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Testimony of Carol Steinke Public Health Committee 14 March 2014 SB 257

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the committee; I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today to lend my support to SB 257, an Act Concerning Hepatitis C Testing.

I am Carol Steinke, the Public Health Nursing Supervisor for the City of Hartford Health and Human Services Department. We are a PSCI Model Clinic (Program Collaboration and Service Integration) offering Sexually Transmitted Disease, HIV, Tuberculosis and Hepatitis C services. We provide Hepatitis C testing at our Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic and also offer Rapid Hepatitis C testing from our mobile van for high risk individuals along with “Baby Boomers”, consistent with the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control.

The 2010 US Census data indicates that there are 1,019,049 Baby Boomers in CT. Baby Boomers disproportionately represent 28.5% of CT’s population; therefore placing CT among the top five states with the highest Baby Boomer population rates. Based on these estimates, the CT HCV registry has captured 44% of the Baby Boomers exposed to HCV; therefore approximately 12,090 (36%) Baby Boomers still need to be identified. In our small Hartford clinic alone over the last 9 months we identified 42 Hepatitis C positive individuals and 36% of those were “Baby Boomers”. Hepatitis C is a silent killer where most people have no symptoms, don’t know they are infected, and don’t seek treatment. We counsel newly diagnosed Hepatitis C individuals and try to determine how they may have contracted the disease; it may have come from a blood transfusion they received prior to 1992, a one-time experimental drug use in the 70’s, or unregulated tattooing (shared needle).

I know an individual, a “Baby Boomer”, who was undergoing chemotherapy treatment for leukemia and had difficulty with his liver processing the drugs. After additional blood work he was found to have Hepatitis C. He had no prior knowledge of the disease and the Hepatitis C caused additional burden to his treatment regime which led to poor a response, and ultimately his death.

Please support the passage of SB 257 that will ensure more individuals get tested for Hepatitis C, linked to care and treatment, and prevent thousands of deaths from liver disease. By requiring primary care providers to offer one time Hepatitis C screening to “Baby Boomers” in Connecticut alone, we can help to identify the estimated 12,090 individuals who are not aware that they have Hepatitis C, link them to care, treatment, and a longer life. Thank you.

